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## INTERPRETIVE REPORT

## Lansdale Still a Saigon Force

RICHARD CRITCHFIELD

SAIGON—It may be too soon to write off Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale as a force in South Viet Nam.

He has been described in the Western press in recent days as a faded star and a failure. American bureaucrats here, noted for never missing bandwagons, say he is just "a straw man."

An ill concealed satisfaction over what they regard as his failure to achieve a political miracle in Saigon is evident among his many rivals in the Military Advisory Command, Central Intelligence Agency, Agency for International Development and Joint United States Public Affairs Office.

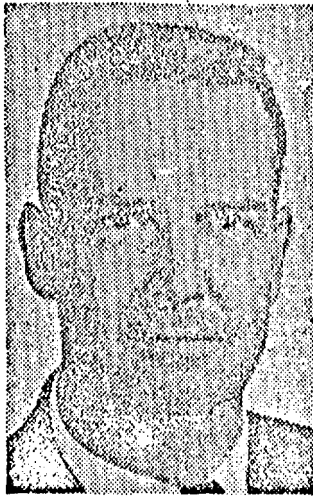
At cocktail parties British diplomats, Polish military officers, Japanese journalists and old French hands debate whether Lansdale is really "out." Some feel the White House recently administered the coup de grace by giving Lansdale ministerial rank.

The truth is, however, that Lansdale's job in Saigon has remained just what he himself and Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge said it was from the beginning. He is the American mission's "senior liaison officer" with working level Vietnamese officials involved in pacification.

He is still an important man in Saigon, and as South Viet Nam's political crisis deepens he could well play a key part in welding the rising nationalism here with broad U.S. policy aims in Asia.

## Decisive Issues

Lodge never intended Lansdale to function from the shadows as a "political adviser" to the Vietnamese leaders. Lodge regards such a task as inherently an ambassador's duty and responsibility. On the decisive issues of peace negotiations, military



EDWARD G. LANSDALE

versus civilian rule and coping with the current Buddhist crisis, Lodge has run a one-man show, personally consulting with and advising the Vietnamese military, political and religious factions.

Lansdale appears to have understood this arrangement from the start; he has close and cordial relations with Lodge and there is no visible friction between them. But neither man has been able to dispel the widespread impression here that Lodge is a kind of striped-pants facade while Lansdale does the real work backstage.

Myths die hard. When he arrived in Saigon last September, Lansdale was widely believed to have secret instructions from President Johnson to serve as a kind of latter-day Machiavelli to Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky's prince.

The fact is Lansdale did not see Ky privately once between Christmas and March 20. He has never met President Johnson except to shake hands and briefly chat at the

public sessions in Honolulu. His only link to the White House is through Lodge and his old friend, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey.

## Start of the Legend

The Lansdale legend began in the early 1950s when, as a young air force colonel, he was the mentor of the famous anti-guerrilla fighter and later president of the Philippines, Ramon Magsaysay.

From 1954 to 1956 he served as the late Premier Ngo Dinh Diem's personal adviser on secret instructions from President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

He returned on several fact-finding missions and in early 1961 recommended in a report that impressed President Kennedy that the United States use its political and economic power to undermine the Viet Cong by sponsoring a social revolution centering on land reform.

Six years later, to the month, these recommendations were embodied in the Declaration of Honolulu.

The Lansdale way to counter Maoist-style Communist insurgency always has been to launch a band of enthusiastic young men, with strong ideas of nationalism and political

ideals behind a worthy and dynamic young leader.

Kennedy seemed about to adopt this approach in 1961 but then leaned toward the more militaristic techniques of Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara and Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor.

## Brimming With Ideas

Then last August, when Lodge returned to Saigon with Lansdale as his top assistant, it appeared that Johnson had decided to combine what might be called the McNamara and Lansdale approaches. When the embassy announced Lansdale's job was limited to advising the South Vietnamese solely on pacification no one believed it.

At first, Lansdale did appear to be Ky's personal political adviser. Word went out that he was deeply impressed with the young jet pilot's dedication and earnestness. At that time Lansdale was brimming with ideas on how to improve the lot of the Vietnamese people, especially the peasants who were suffering most from the war and fleeing their villages by the thousands.

But soon he became the subject of heated controversy. His bluntness and honesty in a city notorious for deviousness had a devastating effect. A wall of secrecy was quickly built up around the general. This reporter has seen Lansdale only four times in eight

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